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ABSTRACT

The first of 11 annotated publications on schools' growing social responsibilities examines ways for schools to help with students' changing family situations (mainly through divorce) and increase educators' sensitivity to the stigma attached to nontraditional families. The second takes issue with those using the schools "as a catchall for problem social issues and as whipping boys" for the United States' diminished economic standing. The next two publications emphasize the need for cooperation among schools and social service agencies for the benefit of children and their families. The fifth article portrays a Texas superintendent's efforts to establish a "lighted schoolhouse" to assist homeless children. H.B. Pinkney's brief article argues persuasively for more support and less criticism for schools struggling to provide expanded services. The next article recounts a Queens, New York, principal's efforts to establish an afterschool care center for kids living in welfare hotels. The two succeeding papers on the problems facing schools argue for less criticism and more cooperation. The next article, a reassessment of the progressive educational legacy, points out that turn-of-the-century reformers went way beyond "Great Society" goals to demand free lunch programs, social workers, health clinics, summer programs to serve the poor, and night school programs for adults. The last article recommends that schools cooperate with social agencies and set limits on what the community can expect of them. (MLH)

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The Role of the School: Educational or Social?

1 **Appel, Karen W.** *America's Changing Families: A Guide for Educators.* Fastback 219. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1985. 47 pages. ED 256 768.

Appel is well qualified to address her essay's subject. She has been a foster parent, single parent, adoptive parent, natural parent, step-parent, grandparent, and the head of a high school home economics department.

The schools must deal with changes in students' family situations, Appel asserts, because such changes inevitably influence children's behavior in school. A divorce, for example, forces a child to cope with lower family incomes, distracted and absent parents, or step-parents and step-siblings.

To assist such children, teachers should talk frankly with students about family changes while assuming a supportive, receptive manner. When interacting with students from broken homes, teachers should acknowledge their pain, affirm their worth, and help them to understand that their problems are not unique.

Administrators can also help students from changing families. Inservice programs on the topic build staff awareness. Principals can be sensitive to the stigma attached to nontraditional families and treat events like Father's Day and parent-child banquets carefully. As a child's home life changes, administrators may need to offer boundary waivers as students move to new houses, refuse visiting rights to noncustodial parents, and make certain that children's name changes are handled sensitively.

Such services are important because the school may be a student's only consistent source of support and stability during a change in her or his family.

2 **Boschee, Floyd.** "Has the United States Lost Its Competitive Edge or Commitment?" *NASSP Bulletin* 73,517 (May 1989): 78-82. EJ 388 776.

Boschee takes issue with those who use public schools "as a catchall for problem social issues and as whipping boys for the current U.S. economic standing in the world."

He notes that the nation's schools have responded successfully to similar charges in the past. In 1957, for example, criticism of the education system mounted after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. Yet educators used the National Defense Education Act to improve science instruction, and a few years later the United States put a man in orbit and then reached the moon. The nation now exceeds in areas like handicapped education and winning Nobel Prizes.

Such achievements have been accomplished despite the federal government's declining commitment to public schools. Boschee is particularly concerned that federal government spending on elementary and secondary education fell $4.2 billion between 1980 and 1986. Those cuts included eliminating a national program for talented and gifted students, a severe reduction in remedial education for poor and minority children, and nearly halving the Bilingual Education Act's budget. The nation's most intelligent and most needy students have suffered most from the federal government's shrinking role in education.

"If America is to develop a competitive economy and strong society," Boschee concludes, "quality public schooling will have to be provided to all our children, including the disadvantaged."

3 **Hodgkinson, Harold L.** *The Same Client: The Demographics of Education and Service Delivery Systems.* Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc./Center for Demographic Policy, September 1989. 29 pages. ED number not yet assigned.

According to Hodgkinson, services (such as education, health care, housing, transportation, and police) are provided for U.S. citizens "by a bewildering array of agencies" at all governmental levels. Same-function agencies often communicate freely, but talk alone can't address today's urgent social problems. Instead, service organizations must communicate across functional lines, and educators must become familiar with other service providers at various levels. Why? As Hodgkinson sees it, these agencies "are serving the same children and families as clients." In an era of diminishing financial resources, this interactive, client-centered approach seems the most effective and humane way to deliver the services justifying each bureaucracy's existence.

Using informative maps, tables, and statistical references, Hodgkinson explores the complex interrelationships among family demography, housing, transportation, health, crime, and education. He argues for cooperation and taxpayer investment in families' basic needs to avoid future problems (and costly programs to deal with them).

For example, to reduce the number (40 percent) of America's children living in poverty, it would be more cost-effective to help low-income, working families secure affordable, appropriate

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housing and to supply small grants for broken-down cars or medical emergencies than to maintain these families on welfare. Similarly, low-cost immunization and prenatal/infant exams are preferable to expensive medical treatments or special education programs for handicapped students. Hodgkinson guesses that one third of all special education children "would have a smaller handicap or none at all, if adequate medical care had been provided during pregnancy and during the first year of life."

Prisons are another costly, "special" service that might be reduced by investing in early education programs (like Head Start) and programs to increase access to college (like TRIO and upward Bound). Whereas a college student or Head Start youngster costs the taxpayer $3,500, a prisoner costs about $20,000 yearly. With prisons operating at 116 percent capacity and consuming a greater portion of the social services budget each year, education seems a wiser investment in the future.

Recent occupational and demographic trends (including metropolitan areas moving across state lines) support Hodgkin's agenda for interagency cooperation headed by the executive branch at each government level. Improvement in one area should improve other areas simultaneously. As Hodgkinson reminds us, the central focus of all social agencies is "a client who must be housed, transported, educated, fed, and kept healthy." The schools are an increasingly important part of this equation.

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4 **Levy, Janet E., with Carol Copple.** *Joining Forces: A Report from the First Year.* Alexandria, Virginia: National Association of State Boards of Education, 1989. 49 pages. ED number not yet assigned.

The National Association of State Boards of Education initiated its Joining Forces Program in late 1987. This report presents ideas on the program's theme: how schools, welfare, and social agencies may cooperate for children's benefit.

A large fraction of the nation's students need special attention. One- fourth of those entering school in 1988 were born into poverty. Over one- half will live in one-parent households during their childhood. Schools must cooperate with welfare and social services, the report says, to "compensate for the disadvantage created by troubled homes and troubled communities."

Such cooperation takes many forms. In Waukesha County, Wisconsin, teachers and social workers meet in teams for two days to discuss mutual concerns and develop proposals for problems like truancy. The Conejo Elementary School in Thousand Oaks, California, encourages Hispanic parents who speak poor English to check out bilingual tapes and books to share with their children. Social workers in Texas' Communities in Schools Program go to schools to work directly with students likely to drop out.

Other recommendations are less time-consuming. The Detroit and Baltimore welfare agencies, for example, include information on schools with clients' assistance checks. Social service and educational personnel in other places cooperate to produce social-service directories and manuals on reporting child abuse or to discuss specific students.

Many of the participants in Joining Forces are confident that the massive social problems that beleaguer schools can be overcome. After all, as one speaker puts it, these problems have emerged "at the very time that twenty years of research and social experiments have produced a critical mass of knowledge needed for taking action."

5 **Penning, Nick.** "Homeless Houston Youth Find Refuge in Schools." *Thrust for Educational Leadership* (October 1989): 23,25. EJ number not yet assigned.

Joan Raymond, general superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, is convinced that school districts must get into residential care to attack the growing homelessness problem, particularly in our inner cities. At Raymond's urging, the Houston Board of Education last winter opened a "lighted schoolhouse" for children with nowhere else to go. The superintendent's action was inspired by televised interviews of kids sleeping on the streets and by principals who found kids sleeping on their schools' doorstep.

Undaunted by obstacles such as liability insurance, guardianship status, and other legalities, Raymond shelved all the questions and went forward. District "lighthouse" programs (for both high school and K-8 youngsters) provided "shelter for homeless children, after-school enrichment for regular day students, and a center for family and community involvement." Supported by Houston citizens, the shelter housed twenty children, who were eventually turned over to Children's Protective Services.

Realizing that young people are scared off by the juvenile detention system and spending too much time in 24-hour cafeterias, Raymond "felt a sense of obligation because you can't teach children to read who are hungry or abandoned." Forced to

suspend the shelter program due to legal ramifications, the district has continued its lighted schoolhouse activities for some 75 to 100 children. Today the lighthouse is a "sophisticated latch-key program" that provides counseling services, referral to appropriate agencies, a homework hotline, and security for the children.

Superintendent Raymond has not given up the fight to provide residential care for children who need it. Temporarily frustrated, she is determined to increase schools' involvement outside the classroom—if only because schools already offer more safety and security than many innercity kids experience elsewhere.

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6 **Pinkney, H.B.** "Public Education: In Search of Believers and Supporters." *Clearing House* 58,6 (February 1985): 251-52. EJ 316 545.

Pinkney argues a simple thesis in this brief article: Schools need more support and less criticism as they struggle to provide expanded services.

Schools have taken on many of the family's responsibilities. Teachers are surrogate parents to students from broken and alcoholic homes and may even teach their students' mothers and fathers how to parent. They are confronted with disruptive juvenile delinquents that social service or correctional agencies cannot serve. School administrators are expected to provide extensive food and medical services.

Yet schools have not received additional resources to meet these new expectations. Educators must particularly emphasize strongly "the need for parental and community involvement in their schools."

Pinkney admits that school officials and teachers often discourage such involvement. The institution has traditionally been off-limits to parents, and many are put off by educational jargon and discourtesy. "It may insult parents to just invite them to school to see their children dance."

School personnel should examine successful models of parent-school cooperation rather than simply assert that parents do not care about their children's education. Successful schools have developed strong public relations. Their staff respect parents and encourage their participation. Students in such schools learn survival, citizenship, and moral skills as well as more basic knowledge.

But even well-supported schools "are only equipped to do so much," and greater community support of schools can only solve some social problems. Other organizations must assume some of the burdens schools bear.

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7 **Quinn, Terrence.** "My Hard Encounter with the Reality of Homeless Children." *The Executive Educator* 11,12 (December 1989): 17-19, 29. EJ number not yet assigned.

Before Terrence Quinn became principal of P.S. 225 in Queens, New York, he had never given much consideration to homelessness. When the school was offered funds for an afterschool program for children living in temporary shelters, he realized that fifty of his own students could benefit from the daily tutoring, arts and crafts lessons, athletic instruction, and snacks provided by this program.

With strong support from the P.S. 225 planning team, Quinn and the school social worker walked the halls of the Rockaway welfare hotels to find clients for the program and invite residents to breakfast in the hotel lobby. Undeterred by the hotel manager's derogatory views of his tenants, twenty mothers attended the breakfast and enrolled their children in the program. The afterschool center became a big success, with more hotel and "regular" kids registering each day.

As familiarity with hotel families increased, so did the school's first-hand involvement with problems beyond its "normal" scope. School staff, with the help of police and other agencies, intervened in living disputes, medical emergencies, and other crises comforting their displaced and warehoused neighbors. Staff also became sensitized to these problem's effects on truancy and chronic absenteeism.

According to Quinn, "The construction of more affordable housing won't solve the problem." Also needed are "adequate health care. . . job training programs, and appropriate educational opportunities for children whose families have fallen though the social safety net." Afterschool recreation and tutoring programs are not enough. Homeless children's minimal needs include preschool enrichment, basic skills tutoring, long-term counseling, educational evaluation and screening, social work and counseling support services, private study space, sensitive school staff, parent involvement, and extended day programs.

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, a two-year-old federal law explained in a sidebar, may help committed educators and homeless advocates cooperate to address homeless youngsters' needs. However, growing public awareness in a few cities have helped provide successful shelter- school projects, afterschool centers, and medical and dental care for homeless children.

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8 **Raywid, Mary Anne; Charles A. Tesconi, Jr; and Donald R. Warren.** "Pride and Promise: Schools of Excellence for All the People." Westbury, New York: American Educational Studies Association, 1984. 59 pages. ED 260 076.

In 1983 the American Educational Studies Association asked these three members to respond to the many criticisms schools face and to offer an alternative vision.

The authors begin by critiquing the critics. Most of them fail to appreciate schools' accomplishments; advance shallow solutions that seldom address class, race, ethnic, or gender differences; do not tie schools to policy-makers like school boards and legislatures; and, most importantly, have no overall vision of what schools are for. Indeed, school reformers have often piled new agendas on old to create a welter of conflicting and unworkable educational goals.

The public school needs a stable purpose that is understood and shared by the democratic society to which it belongs. The development of intelligence, the authors assert, should be its central concern. Educational goals should be stated "in terms of concepts, understandings, and general skills," not "as particular content to be mastered." The ability to extract data from experience and books encourages the individual and social understanding that democracy requires.

Successful implementation will require less structure and more cooperation than most schools now practice. Students require a more user- friendly and stimulating environment, and teachers require better training and more collegial relations.

The essay's particular proposals are connected by the assumption that educational excellence "is offered by people, not imposed on them."

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9 **Rittenmeyer, Dennis C.** "School Reform: Can It Succeed?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Atlanta, February 22-26, 1986. 9 pages. ED 266 136.

Rittenmeyer forcefully argues that criticism of the nation's schools is largely misplaced. Educational problems, let alone

social ones, cannot be solved simply by improving schools.

Schools are often asked to address problems not of their making. Rittenmeyer cites the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 as an example and claims that it made schools responsible for reversing racism by declaring that separate educational facilities and programs were inherently unequal. Schools must feed the poor, counsel those from broken families, and offer classes to counter teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, alcoholism, and suicide. All these programs detract from schools' primary educational mission.

Reformers also fail to assess how social ills have affected schools. Drugs, alcohol, and crime disrupt the classroom. Issues like teenage pregnancy invite community criticism. Simply ignoring the problem means more pregnancies and more dropouts. But providing sex education consumes time and money and invites heated criticism.

Society has "required our schools to become the largest and most comprehensive social service delivery system in the world." But society, not the schools, generated the manifold problems it asks the schools to solve. Society, not schools, must change.

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10 **Sedlak, Michael W., and Steven Schlossman.** "The Public School and Social Services: Reassessing the Progressive Legacy." *Educational Theory* 35,4 (Fall 1985): 371-83. EJ 324 622.

Sedlak and Schlossman argue that schools have been much more resistant to Great-Society reforms than modern-day critics suppose. They examine an earlier reform era to support their point.

Progressive, turn-of-the-century reformers wanted schools to be all- purpose social service institutions. Schools would alleviate poverty by providing lunches, social workers, nurses, and health clinics. They would stay open in the summer to accommodate the poor and at night to serve adults. Vocational counselors would ensure that all children received careful preparation for appropriate careers. Other specialists would provide training in health, sex, and safety.

Very few schools embraced such innovations. Vocational testing, for example, was inexact and few students, parents, teachers, or employers trusted it. Many more programs simply never got started. School administrators avoided sex education, and the American Medical Association successfully lobbied against school clinics. Most schools eschewed lunch programs until well into the century, and most of the others relied heavily on external financial support. Only organized recreation and competitive sports won thorough support.

Historians, according to Sedlak and Schlossman, have overstated the progressives' influence by paying "closer attention to rhetoric than to implementation." Modern critics also mistakenly assume that recent progressives succeeded in broadening the school's social mission when, in fact, most schools still emphasize the standard academic course of study.

But the early twentieth-century reformers articulated important ideals that teachers and administrators have had to since reckon with. "From the 'progressive' standpoint," the authors conclude, "the problem may not be that the schools have aspired to do too much, but that they have done too little."

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11 **Williams, Robert.** "Let's Set Some Limits on What We Do." *Thrust for Educational Leadership* 16 (January 1987): 21-22, 27. EJ 347 171.

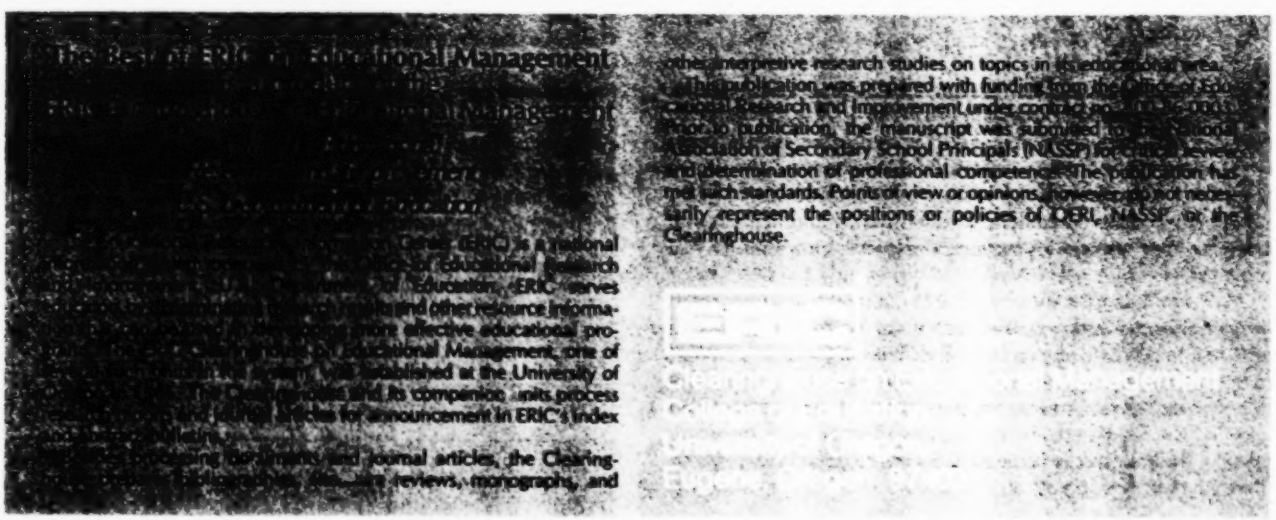
Although Williams is ostensibly concerned with high school dropouts, his short essay is largely devoted to setting limits on what schools can accomplish.

School personnel must realize that they have particular roles, that they cannot play those roles without sufficient resources, and that they should not assume blame for other institutions' failures.

"For too long," writes Williams, "schools have accepted charges for which they have neither the expertise nor the material resources to accomplish." They are often expected to provide counseling, a role that results in higher student-to-teacher ratios. They are asked to compensate for single-parent families, unemployment, racial conflict, and segregated housing. Schools are then blamed if such problems persist.

Williams allows that schools can relieve some social problems, such as dropping out. Providing a caring, positive, and flexible learning environment are proved methods of keeping students in school. But schools should not bear such burdens alone. Other parts of the community should assist them.

Schools can foster this sort of community cooperation if their staff surrender "an ivory tower approach" to managing schools. The "interdependent nature of our society" has made such isolation outmoded and costly. School personnel must instead both work more closely with the community and set limits on what the community can expect of them.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